

## Evaluation visit to Lochyside RC Primary School, Highland

**Title of the project:** *The Wee Big Book Project*

### **Aims of the project:**

- To enhance learners' enjoyment and understanding of their own and other cultures through literature and other forms of language
- To develop learners' competence in different languages so that they can understand and communicate in those languages
- To develop a secure understanding of how language works

## **Discussion of self-evaluation paper: key messages from the school**

### **Background**

Lochyside RC Primary School is situated two miles west of Fort William. There were 78 pupils on the school roll at the time of the visit, with four teaching staff and four composite classes. There were two MLPS (French) trained teachers, one native French speaker and one GLPS trained teacher. The school includes global citizenship projects as part of the curriculum. One of the trained teachers teaches French to her own P6/P7 class and to the P5/P6 class through the 'drop in' method. Class teachers do some follow-up French work with their classes where this method is used. The other trained MLPS teacher has introduced French to her P1 class. The headteacher is timetabled to deliver Gaelic although there was no Gaelic lesson on the day of the visit.

### **Resources/methodology**

Children have been involved in producing the art work used to illustrate a series of 'big books', working with the artist in residence at the independent art studio based in the school. The books have been professionally produced and provide a high quality resource in terms of visual impact and potential for learning. Classes have begun to use the books with their teacher and to work with some of the support worksheets prepared by the school. Staff and pupils have produced the following as 'big books':

- A science story based on the growth cycle of plants, in French
- The story of Fair Trade bananas, in French and in Gaelic
- A comparative study of Scotland and le Sénégal in French and in Scots
- A fairy story in Gaelic
- The story of St Columba in Gaelic and Scots
- The Tale of the Three Sons in Gaelic and Scots

### **Children's experiences and achievements**

The school has found that the process of making The Wee Big Books has provided a unique opportunity to address language and literacy outcomes as well as develop children's knowledge of the technical details of producing a book, such as design and typeface.

### **Support for learners**

As a result of the raised profile of languages through the 1+2 languages project, the school has decided to extend the learning of French into all classes across the school from Primary 1 to Primary 7 although this was not part of the original pilot project. This has led staff to use a Sunderland MLPS resource which they feel is helping them ensure continuity and progression in learning and teaching from early to second Level.

The school feels that all core activities are differentiated to cater for differing levels of ability and that paired and group work provide opportunities for peer supported learning. Links with other subject areas, such as the growth cycle in science, has allowed children to apply knowledge from other subjects, and this has led to increased confidence.

### **Successes of the pilot (from the self-evaluation)**

The school feels that quality resources have been produced which are pitched at the correct level of language development for second Level with relevant age appropriate contexts. Children are beginning to see learning languages as a set of skills which can be applied across other languages in the future. Staff have found it an enjoyable and interesting project and feel that the children have increased their knowledge and understanding of languages as a result of their participation.

### **Issues arising (from the self-evaluation)**

It would have been more efficient and effective for the teacher to be seconded for a specific period of time in order to complete the project, had that been possible, rather than doing the development work over a number of days over the year.

## **Overall evaluation by Education Scotland based on evidence during the visit**

The enthusiasm of staff has created a whole-school focus on language and other cultures. It permeates the work of the school. In addition to teaching Gaelic and French from P5, the school was inspired by the pilot to introduce French from P1. There is a French Club. Scots is actively explored through song and storytelling. This session, a Polish child is learning French and Gaelic with classmates and has taught some Polish to others. The child's father has come into school to teach children Polish Christmas carols and the school is now planning a Polish project. This is indicative of the school's appreciation of other cultures as well as their own.

The books produced by the school were written by the staff and illustrated by the children. In addition, staff have produced a wide range of materials to develop children's literacy and language skills through working with, and reading, the big books. The books are of very high quality, as they have been produced professionally with the help of the artist in residence. This makes very good use of a local resource. The themes of the books link to other areas of the curriculum and to the local context. This enables children to engage in reading activities relevant to their learning elsewhere. For example, the science book in French tells the story of plant growth, based on the Es and Os, while another, in both French and Gaelic, is

related to Fair Trade which is a whole school focus. The story of the three kings links to the children's reading of a Roald Dahl text. Others, such as the fairy story in Gaelic, provide a strong link to children's own local culture. Children are encouraged to compare Scotland with le Sénégal after reading it. One of the follow-up activities links outcomes from modern languages and social subjects to develop children's writing skills.

The follow-up activities linked to the books are designed to develop literacy skills such as decoding, sequencing and writing longer text. Learners are challenged positively by more difficult texts and are developing good skills in working out language which contains words they do not know. The use of stories that children are familiar with, such as the local fairy story, helps them explore the language of the texts. In class, they used a 'guesstimate and check' technique to work out words by seeing links to words they already know. They are developing skills in using a bilingual dictionary to check out their theories. For example, a French song led to a recognition of the differences and similarities between '*poirier*' and '*poire*'. In class, children were well supported by their teacher in carrying out these tasks and also supported each other very well in their groups. There was evidence of differentiation in the school's approaches at the upper stages and it will be important to develop differentiated approaches earlier down the school as the language is introduced from P1 onwards.

Children are developing their skills in all four key skill areas as well as developing a good knowledge of grammar. Teachers would welcome further advice on how to teach grammar in an age appropriate way. On classroom displays, there are good examples of children's writing skills in the languages they study. There is scope for teachers to use the additional language more consistently for everyday language such as commands, although staff do use parts of other languages outwith specific language lessons.

The books offer a good level of language which is appropriately challenging for second level but made more accessible through support sheets and direction from the class teacher. Children said that working out the language in this way 'made you think'. They enjoy working out the meanings of words in the reading lessons and are developing their literacy skills through the other languages in this way. The school should ensure that sufficient scaffolding is in place for more difficult texts. In one lesson, children at P6/P7 were working out the meaning of a French song which they then sang, demonstrating good pronunciation. Overall, lessons moved at a brisk pace and kept the children engaged in their activities.

At P1, children enjoyed singing a song in French and using their knowledge of French numbers to play a counting game. They have adapted naturally to use of the language in activities which engage and stimulate them. The challenge will be for staff to maintain this level of fun and engagement whilst ensuring that children keep progressing as they move forward in their learning.

The school is using a structured programme to assist in delivering progression in skills and the school's planning is based clearly on the Es and Os. There is scope to make these aims more explicit to children so that they know what they are trying to

achieve within the four skills and can see the progress they are making. This would tie in well with the children's learning targets which are displayed on the classroom walls. The next step for the school will be to build up a picture of children's progress in the four key skills from evidence of the work they do in class.

Overall, across the classes, children demonstrate good pronunciation of French. Children in the upper stages say that they particularly enjoy reading and talking in other languages. They find that reading out loud and singing songs helps them to remember words. They are aware that they are developing strategies for working out words they do not know such as seeing if they are related to words they do know. They spoke positively of using the Big Book for Gaelic with their teacher recently. They feel that reading in another language makes you think harder and then helps you understand more. The pilot project has delivered a way of helping children develop their literacy skills whilst developing skills in another language.

As the school moves to full implementation of the recommendations of the *1+2 report*, staff have expressed some concern over staffing and over having sufficient time to devote to additional language learning. By integrating the language more in to the work of the class, and by continuing to have small inputs of language at the early stages, this should be eased. In the interim, it is thanks to the work of the school that children are confident language learners who want to learn more languages in the future.